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Just who is responsible for Suárez?

by Dr Dan Parnell | 02/07/2014 | 0 Comments

Following the now infamous behavior of Suárez within the World Cup 2014 and the ensuing media frenzy, Dr Daniel Parnell, Senior Lecturer in Sport Business Management considers who is responsible for helping ensure that football reduces the risk of this happening again.

After all the controversy of the Luis Suárez bite saga, he has now issued an apology to Giorgio Chiellini, “and the entire football family”. Yet, as the Uruguayan faces a four-month ban from football, the **loss of a sponsor** and the reality of having denied and lied about the incident to FIFA, it appears that his footballing skills are still in hot demand. Some of the more cynical of us will see this u-turn in morality and subsequent apology a by-product of the entrenched commercialised culture evident in football and therefore at best an insincere public relations ploy, helping prime a lucrative transfer to the Catalan giants, Barcelona.

Suárez’s ‘previous’ misdemeanors include three bites and an incident of apparent racism, which have led to a range of disciplinary measures including football bans, internal discipline and financial penalties. However, it is evident that this approach doesn’t appear to work. As Suárez considers his move from a club who has supported him throughout much angst (including one of the bites and apparent racism) should Liverpool and the ‘football family’ now (and finally), wash their hands with him?

At this point, I must confess I am an Evertonian. Yet, I don’t harbor any ill-feelings nor any desire to see Suárez sacked or excluded from the football family. Suarez, unfortunately, is part of the commodity driven, politically influenced ecosystem that is football. He is a pawn in this game that involves russian billionaires, americanised franchise fanatics and world leaders. Despite this, as I am someone who likes to talk about football being responsible (more typically in their local communities), therefore as opposed to stating how abhorrent I believe Suárez is, I want to question whether the ‘football family’ owes Suárez some real help rather than brushing this incident under the carpet through an exalted transfer to Barcelona.

If we were to frame this within the Football and corporate social responsibility narrative, football appears to be getting better at shouting about how it changes lives across communities, but alongside side this, we must ask and challenge football to deal with the employees. Deal with them, in a positive and progressive manner. Unfortunately, football tends to focus on short-term quick fixes with little consideration for the long-term consequence.

Whilst, the Professional Footballers Association has offered access to anger management and at Liverpool FC Suárez has had access to a breath of support mechanism including some of the top sport and football psychologists it is clear more work is needed. What isn't clear is how much he accesses this support, which might be key. As my colleague Dr Andrew Manley outlines in a [recent article](#) , Suárez could change, he could stop biting, but this would require time and importantly his own personal commitment to change.

I recall my time at Ladbrokes and working with [GamCare](#) , whereby players can 'ban' themselves from being allowed to gamble. Could Suárez genuinely commit to change, by involving psychological support in his rehabilitation or as part of contractual negotiations with his new clubs or take an even bolder, more courageous step and self-commit to quitting football if he bites again? Maybe, maybe not.

We have already lost some greats (Best, Cantona, Gascoigne), who are joined with tens of thousands of young unknowns. These are the youth players that can't rely on their economic value to survive controversy and are quietly and swiftly dispensed by the 'football family'.

Ultimately, the football family needs to get genuine. It needs to do as families do and show more love for its players. It needs a more ethical and moral re-alignment from the top-down. Yes, I am talking about [FIFA](#), UEFA, the national governing bodies and clubs themselves. I am left with hopes that football can aspire to live up to the belief of those in football development offices up and down the country and around the world. I hope that football can develop some of those old-school (and much loved) personalised player outcomes, for character, self-discipline and physical and moral courage. I am confident that it is possible to achieve a future where clubs and players are responsible and are willing to take responsibility for their actions on and off the pitch.